
Thomas The Apostle Of Courage

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

*"Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails,
and place my finger in the mark of the nails,
and place my hand in his side, I will not believe. -John 20.25*

There was an ancient monk of the Christian Church. This wise man was deep in prayer one day when he saw a glorious vision of light and majesty. He looked up to see a splendid image of Jesus himself. This image seemed wise and all-knowing; the image had answered great questions and showed great care and compassion. He seemed perfect.

But the wise monk had one request of this marvelous image of Christ. The wise monk said, "Please, show me your hands." The image offered his hands. "Away with you," the wise monk exclaimed, "for your hands are smooth and unscarred. The hands of my Savior are pierced with holes and wounded. Away with you, you imposter." Thus was the wise monk able to discern his Savior from the great deceivers of the world.

That monk has gone down in history as a wise and spiritual man, whereas, somehow, the apostle Thomas has become relegated to the doubting category. Even if we are beyond calling Thomas merely "Doubting Thomas," still we often limit our interpretation of his story to the simplistic "it is okay to doubt."

The real power of the story of St. Thomas is that he asked for wounds, just as the great monk would years later. Authentic religion is not just the glory and the mystery; it is also the acknowledgment of pain.

We have entered a season of the church year when we proclaim resurrection. "Alleluia, Christ is Risen!" But how do we see Jesus Christ in the world? How do we believe in resurrection today, in our own time? Do we acknowledge Jesus by being talked into it through some intellectual argument? No, I believe we see Jesus today exactly in the way Thomas and the rest of the apostles saw him long ago.

We see Jesus by looking at his side and his hands. We see him by touching his wounds, by touching the wounds of people in this world. When we see wounds and when we are brave enough to touch them, then we may also see and touch Christ. Of course it takes courage. It has always taken courage to enter mystery and to admit pain. Religious faith is a courageous act.

Many of the wounds we touch are in us who are the Church. That is as it should be, for we say of ourselves that we are the Body of Christ. Most of us have scars on our hands, and we have holes in our hearts. We are the lonely, the hurt, the abandoned and ostracized.

And many of the wounds of this world are outside the Church, among the poor, the sick, the homeless, among those about whom Jesus said, "Even as you do it to one of the least of these, when you clothe them, feed them, give them something to drink, you have done it to me." Jesus Christ, then, is among the wounded, the hurt and lost people of this world. That is where we would find Christ, not just the crucified Christ, but also the resurrected Christ!

In fact, it is sometimes easier to see Christ if we don't expect intellectual answers to our intellectual questions. When we ask, "How can that wounded person be Christ?", we don't get an answer in words. The answer comes when we recognize in a great mystery that the wounds of that person are the same wounds Christ had. The answer comes when we touch those wounds and believe for ourselves. Like Thomas, we have to touch them for ourselves.

It takes courage to be like Thomas. Courage to know our doubts and have the freedom to express them. Courage to touch the wounds of Christ in today's world. Is Thomas, then, the apostle of doubt? I believe not. St. Thomas is the Apostle of Courage.

The Resurrection of the Crucified Jesus reveals something quite powerful about the Christian faith. Peace cannot come from someone who has not known violence. Forgiveness cannot come from someone who has not been betrayed. The Holy Spirit cannot come from someone who has not felt forsaken. Wholeness cannot come from someone who hasn't been wounded. But thanks be to God, and thanks be to Thomas, our Lord is all those things. Our Lord is a betrayed Jesus, a wounded Savior, a scarred Jesus, a pierced healer.

His resurrection is for wounded people. His resurrection is for doubting people. It is for people who need peace. It is for people who need forgiveness. It is for people who need courage. His resurrection is for us.

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler